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Background

In 1965, waste impoundments were established by constructing berms within the estuarine marsh directly north of the what is now Interstate 10. The Site is located west of the main river channel of the San Jacinto River, east of the City of Houston and northwest of Baytown, between unincorporated Channelview and Highlands.

Recent sampling and survey work conducted as part of the Superfund process shows that dredging operations around the Site likely removed part of the berm on the north-western side of the impoundments. Due to dredging encroachment and subsidence of the river over time, dioxin-bearing materials were apparently released to areas around the impoundments.

Today, these impoundments are being contained as part of a U.S. EPA Superfund project being paid for by the responsible parties under the direction of the Agency. Partners in the process include Harris County and other Federal, State, and local agencies.

The site was placed on the National Priorities List (NPL) on March 19, 2008. The NPL is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) list of uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites identified for long term cleanup under the Federal Superfund program.

Cleanup

Disposal operations at the site have been inactive for more than four decades. Cleanup/stabilization of the 15.7-acre original impoundment site began in December 2010 and was substantially completed in August 2011. This action provided immediate stabilization of dioxin sources found within the original perimeter of the impoundments.

The stabilization program involved the design and construction of a physical protective barrier over the original impoundment area to address the release or threat of release of dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzo-furans into the San Jacinto River. The protective barrier includes layers

of strong geofabric and geomembrane that were installed with an overlying graded layer of armoring materials. This capping system encapsulates underlying contaminated material, and prevents movement of contaminated soils and sediments from the area of the old impoundments.

In addition to the construction of a physical barrier to keep the waste secure, public access restrictions have been put into place. The restrictions involve placement of security fences and signs to prevent trespassing onto the property. Dioxins, an unintended byproduct of past paper-making processes, are also produced from a variety of natural and man-made processes that involve burning or combustion.

Community Awareness

To assure public awareness of the site's significance, a wide range of no-trespassing and cautionary signs regarding contact with the site and consumption of seafood have been posted around the perimeter of the site in multiple languages. Fencing and barbed wire along more than 3,000 feet of shoreline were also installed in 2010 to prevent public access.

Committed to Cleanup

The responsible parties will continue to work with EPA, State, local Agencies and community stakeholders to assure that dioxins associated with the waste impoundments are addressed so they do not pose a risk to humans or the environment.

What is Next?

EPA, in cooperation with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the responsible parties, will continue to develop the draft Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS) for the site. The RI/FS frames the longer term clean-up plan. So far, investigations of sediment, soil and biological tissue have been completed, and a draft Preliminary Site Characterization Report is in progress. By June 2012 all remaining data gaps will be closed, the site-specific human and ecological risk assessments will be performed by mid-2012, and the fate and transport of chemicals will be evaluated and described. These will support the Remedial Investigation Report, which provides the information needed to develop a cleanup plan for the areas outside of the original impoundments that may be affected. Specific cleanup options will be developed and presented in the draft Feasibility Study in 2013.

Citizens will continue to have the opportunity to provide input to RI/FS activities. EPA and TCEQ will continue to provide community engagement efforts throughout the process to ensure that the surrounding communities have an opportunity to provide review and input throughout the process. Agencies will also continue to collaborate on the best possible practices

such as those recently implemented such as signage and advisories, to inform and involve site visitors, residents, and local agencies on site health concerns and future site-related activities.

Technical Assistance Grant

EPA has awarded a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) to a coalition of two local organizations (Galveston Bay Foundation, in collaboration with Texans Together) who will work together to interpret site information and data for the community with the assistance of a Technical Advisor.

For More Information

U.S. EPA:

Gary Miller
Superfund Remedial Project Manager
214.665.8318 or 1.800.533.3508 (toll-free)

Valmichael Leos
Superfund On-Scene Coordinator
214.665.2283 or 1.800.533.3508 (toll-free)

Stephen Tzhone
Superfund Remedial Project Manager
214.665.8409 or 1.800.533.3508 (toll-free)

Donn Walters
**Superfund Sr. Community Involvement
Coordinator / Public Liaison**
214.665.6483 or 1.800.533.3508 (toll-free)

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality:

Luda Voskov
Project Manager, Superfund Section
512-239-6368

Crystal Taylor
Community Relations, Superfund Section
512.239.3844

Site Repository
Highlands Public Library, Stratford Branch
509 Stratford Street, Highlands Texas

All inquiries from the news media should be directed to the Region 6 Press Office at 214.665.2200.

San Jacinto Waste Pits Superfund Site on the Internet
www.sanjacintowastepits.com or
www.epa.gov/region6/6sf/pdffiles/0606611.pdf

To receive a Spanish translation of this fact sheet call U.S. EPA at 1.800.533.3508 (toll-free).

Para recibir una traducción en español de esta hoja de datos, comunicarse con la Agencia de Protección del Medio Ambiente de los EEUU (la EPA) al número de teléfono 1.800.533.3508 (llamada gratis).

